USDA Replaces Food Pyramid

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has recently released a new symbol and interactive food guidance system. “Steps to a Healthier You,” MyPyramid’s central message, is designed to help Americans live longer, better and healthier lives. MyPyramid, which replaces the Food Guide Pyramid introduced in 1992, is part of an overall food guidance system that emphasizes the need for a more individualized approach to improving diet and lifestyle.

MyPyramid is about the ability of Americans to personalize their approach when choosing a healthier lifestyle that balances nutrition and exercise. According to the USDA, many Americans can dramatically improve their overall health by making modest improvements to their diets and by incorporating regular physical activity into their daily lives.

MyPyramid incorporates recommendations from the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which was released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in January. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans provide authoritative advice for people two years of age and older about how proper dietary

HUD To Propose Sweeping Changes

Senator Wayne Allard (R-CO) has introduced The State and Local Housing Flexibility Act of 2005 (S. 771) to restructure Section 8 housing programs. The legislation would make sweeping changes for the voucher and public housing programs. Income targeting would be greatly reduced. The bill would greatly expand the number of public housing agencies that would be eligible to become Moving to Work sites and the types of programmatic flexibilities they would have. The bill would also limit the use of enhanced vouchers, which protect residents of project-based Section 8 housing at risk of losing their housing, to 12 months.

All of these changes represent great risks to current residents of HUD-assisted housing and those most in need of affordable housing assistance in the future.

Title One, “Flexible Voucher Program.”

This title would make several major changes to the voucher program. The bill proposes to shift the program’s income targeting requirements away from those most in need of affordable

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued on page 5)
**Homeless Headlines**

**Rural Housing Loans, Guarantees and Grants**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has announced the availability of over $4.2 billion in funding to build and improve rural housing facilities through USDA’s Rural Development housing programs.

In Illinois last year, Rural Development provided over $188 million in financing to help build, buy, refinance or repair single family homes or apartment buildings in rural areas. Another $11 million was used to help people living in those apartment buildings pay the rent when their income was insufficient to cover it.

**Income Stability Decreases Among Low-Income Households**

The incomes of low-income households have become more unstable in recent years, according to a recent analysis featured in the Los Angeles Times. According to Times: “During the early 1970s, the inflation adjusted incomes of most families in the bottom fifth of the economy bounced up and down no more than 25 percent a year. By the beginning of this decade, those annual fluctuations had doubled to as much as 50 percent. . . . For a family with an income at the 20th percentile—or roughly $23,000 a year in inflation-adjusted terms—that has meant recent annual swings of as much as $12,000. Twenty-five years ago, those swings tended to be no more than $4,300.” The analysis further shows that families are also more likely to see their household income plummet by 50 percent or more when there is a family crisis or “shock to the system.” As an example, between 1970 and 1980, 13 percent of families in which the head of household became unemployed saw their income drop by 50 percent or more. Between 1990 and 2000, 27 percent of such families saw their income drop by 50 percent or more.

To conduct the analysis, the Los Angeles Times relied on the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, a dataset utilized by social scientists who examine poverty dynamics. The researchers followed a model developed by two leading economists, Robert Moffitt and Peter Gottschalk, who have studied the dynamics of poverty.


**The Rural Rental Housing Direct Loan Program** provides loans for multi-family housing complexes in rural areas. The deadline for submitting loan applications is May 13, 2005.

Through an active network of lenders and real estate professionals all across Illinois, in 13 years, Rural Development in Illinois has guaranteed over $1 billion in loans to make sure people in Illinois have a good place to live.

The funding includes approximately $99.2 million in direct loans and $99.2 million in loan guarantees for multi-family housing. These funds may be used to repair and rehabilitate existing units and to build new units. Also available are $44 million in competitive loan and grants for the construction of off-farm rental housing units for domestic farm workers, and $8.8 million (Continued on page 7)

**Income Assistance: Documenting Disabilities**

Applications Obtaining health insurance and monthly incomes through the SSI and SSDI programs can help many people escape the terrible trap of homelessness. The National Health Care for the Homeless Council has announced the publication of a new paper to improve access to Federal disability benefits for eligible persons, including people experiencing chronic homelessness. The paper provides practical advice, based experience in using the Social Security Administration’s Listing of Impairments, to help medical providers efficiently and effectively document their patients’ impairments in support of SSI or SSDI disability benefit applications.

To download or order a copy of the paper, “Documenting Disability: Simple Strategies for Medical Providers,” visit www.nhchc.org.

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Ending Chronic Homelessness Among People with Mental Illness

Shelter Partnership, in collaboration with Lamp Community, OPCC (formerly Ocean Park Community Center), and the RAND Corporation, has published Ending Chronic Homelessness Among People with Mental Illness: The Community Model. This training manual explains the philosophy and structure of the Community Model, a high-tolerance, low-demand service philosophy developed by Lamp Community in Los Angeles over the past two decades that has shown dramatic success in serving chronically homeless persons with mental illness. The manual is also intended to assist service providers and policymakers to understand the Community Model approach and use it to more effect than traditional mental health and housing programs.

For more information on this collaborative, the Community Model, or to obtain a free electronic copy of the manual, please see www.communitymodella.org. If you would like a copy sent directly to you through the mail, please contact Shelter Partnership at 213-688-2188.

(Continued on page 7)

### 2005 Continuum of Care Initial Pro Rata Need

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Table courtesy of Kevin Gorsek, Illinois Department of Human Services. (217) 782-1317
Habits can promote health and reduce the risk of major chronic diseases. MyPyramid was developed to carry the messages of the dietary guidelines and to make Americans aware of the vital health benefits of simple and modest improvements in nutrition, physical activity and lifestyle behavior.

The MyPyramid symbol, which is deliberately simple, is meant to encourage consumers to make healthier food choices and to be active every day. Consumers can get more in-depth information from the new Web site, MyPyramid.gov, so that they can make these choices to fit their own needs.

The MyPyramid symbol represents the recommended proportion of foods from each food group and focuses on the importance of making smart food choices in every food group, every day. Physical activity is a new element in the symbol.

MyPyramid illustrates:

- Personalization, demonstrated by the MyPyramid Web site. To find a personalized recommendation of the kinds and amounts of food to eat each day, go to MyPyramid.gov.
- Gradual improvement, encouraged by the slogan, “Steps to a Healthier You.” It suggests that individuals can benefit from taking small steps to improve their diet and lifestyle each day.
- Physical activity, represented by the steps and the person climbing them, as a reminder of the importance of daily physical activity.
- Variety, symbolized by the six color bands representing the five food groups of MyPyramid and oils. Foods from all groups are needed each day for good health.
- Moderation, represented by the narrowing of each food group from bottom to top. The wider base stands for foods with little or no solid fats, added sugars, or caloric sweeteners. These should be selected more often to get the most nutrition from calories consumed.
- Proportionality, shown by the different widths of the food group bands. The widths suggest how much food a person should choose from each group. The widths are just a general guide, not exact proportions. Check MyPyramid.gov for the amount that is right for you.

The new food guidance system utilizes interactive technology found on MyPyramid.gov. MyPyramid contains interactive activities that make it easy for individuals to key in their age, gender and physical activity level so that they can get a more personalized recommendation on their daily calorie level based on the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. It also allows individuals to find general food guidance and suggestions for making smart choices from each food group.

MyPyramid.gov features:

- MyPyramid Plan - provides a quick estimate of what and how much food you should eat from the different food groups by entering your age, gender and activity level.
- MyPyramid Tracker - provides more detailed information on your diet quality and physical activity status by comparing a day’s worth of foods eaten with current nutrition guidance. Relevant nutrition and physical activity messages are tailored to your desire to maintain your current weight or to lose weight.
- Inside MyPyramid - provides in-depth information for every food group, including recommended daily amounts in commonly used measures, like cups and ounces, with examples and everyday tips. The section also includes recommendations for choosing healthy oils, discretionary calories and physical activity.
- Start Today - provides tips and resources that include downloadable suggestions on all the food groups and physical activity, and a worksheet to track what you are eating.

Future enhancements to MyPyramid.gov will include features that make it possible for consumers to make specific food choices by group.
Sweeping Changes  
(Continued from page 1)

housing, extremely low income (ELI) households with incomes less than 30% of the area median income (AMI). Today, 75% of vouchers must go to ELI households. Nationally, 84% of all severely cost burdened households are ELI households. The bill would require at least 90% of vouchers to go to households with incomes up to 60% of AMI. The bill allows for a housing authority to impose time limits, after five years of assistance, to voucher holders.

Housing authorities would determine their own rent policies. In setting rent for a family, a PHA could establish a flat rent, a tiered-income rent structure, a rent based on a percentage of family income, keep today’s rent structure or chose any combination of these options as they best fit the PHAs’ needs. In addition to establishing any rent structure desired, housing authorities would also set their own maximum subsidy levels for housing assistance that are “reasonable and appropriate for the market area.” It appears that HUD would no longer set fair market rents (FMRs).

Elderly and disabled families that currently receive assistance would continue to do so under current program rules until January 1, 2009. Then, housing authorities could implement policies to protect these families. Any newly assisted elderly and disabled families (who begin receiving assistance after January 1, 2009) would be treated like any other family under this bill unless and until housing authorities took specific action to ensure that their needs are met.

Portability is scaled back in the bill. Vouchers would be portable only when the giving and receiving housing authorities had a written agreement. With what sounds like few exceptions, these agreements could only be among housing authorities in the same state or region. Only “transfer-eligible families” could transfer their voucher assistance to another jurisdiction within the same state or region.

Housing authorities would also be able to develop local self-sufficiency initiatives. Voucher funds could be used toward self-sufficiency initiatives to pay for program coordinators, housing assistance and to establish or maintain escrow account incentives.

Enhanced vouchers are curtailed. Many of the residents in the more than 300,000 units that have opted out or prepaid out of HUD project-based assistance since the late 1990s have been able to rely on enhanced vouchers to keep their housing. In the bill, enhanced vouchers are good for only 12 months, after which time they revert to a regular voucher.

Funding to housing authorities for the voucher program would be proportional to FY 2005 funding. No more than two years after enactment, the HUD Secretary would establish a formula for the allocation of funds through negotiated rulemaking. The Secretary would also establish performance standards and a performance assessment system for the voucher program, which will “reward PHAs for good performance and hold them accountable for poor performance.”

The bill would also allow income re-certifications once every two years and once every three years for elderly and disabled households. Unit inspections would be made for each unit within 60 days of the initial assistance payment. After initial inspection, housing agencies could inspect at least 25 percent of units each year so that every unit is inspected at least once every four years.

Title Two, “Public Housing Rent Flexibility and Simplification.”

Housing authorities would get broad flexibility to determine rent policies, similar to that under Title One’s Flexible Voucher Program. Public housing targeting requirements would remain the same as under current law. Family incomes would be reviewed at least once every two years and incomes for senior and disabled families would be reviewed at least once every three years.

Elderly and disabled families living in public housing before January 1, 2009 would be treated the same as under current law. After that date, newly assisted elderly and disabled families and pre-2009 elderly and disabled families would fall under the new program rules proposed in the bill unless and until PHAs develop and implement a policy to ensure that the needs of assisted elderly and disabled families are met with regard to, among other things, eligibility for assistance and rent levels. According to HUD’s talking points, housing authorities must develop such policies by January 1, 2009.

Title Three, “Moving to Work Program.”

This title creates a permanent Moving to Work (MTW) program. MTW is a 1996 HUD demonstration program involving 24 high performing housing authorities that were given considerable regulatory flexibility. This proposal goes beyond that considerable flexibility. Except for demolition and disposition requirements for public housing, the HUD Secretary could waive any provision of the U. S. Housing Act, streamline procedures and provide for immediate implementation of this title.

(Continued on page 7)
Overcoming Community Opposition

Civil rights lawyers Michael Allen and Sara Pratt have announced the availability of a new toolkit and training program to help organizations and developers overcome community resistance to developing affordable and supportive housing. The print resource, “Addressing Community Opposition to Affordable Housing Development: A Fair Housing Toolkit,” provides practical tips and information on:

- Confronting common NIMBY concerns
- Launching a successful community campaign
- Advancing fair housing while protecting free speech
- When local government is not on your side
- Opposition to housing for people with disabilities

It also provides information on cases pursued under the Fair Housing Act and a list of resources for developers and advocates. In conjunction with the toolkit, Allen and Pratt have also designed and offer trainings in the form of half-day or full-day workshops on managing local opposition to housing development, as well as technical assistance consultations.

For further information, contact sleepratt@aol.com or (301) 891-7272.

Public Relations “How-To” Guide

The Housing Assistance Council has released a public relations guide for groups engaged in promoting the availability of affordable housing in isolated rural communities where access to media outlets and marketing specialists is a challenge. The Public Relations Guide for Rural Housing Organizations is intended to serve as a “how to” guide for any public relations action, with step by step instructions, as well as strategic advice.

Although intended for rural housing advocates, the report is a useful tool for all housing advocates who manage public relations activities, from writing press releases and letters to the editor, to public speaking or using paid advertisements.

Public Relations Guide for Rural Housing Organizations can be found at www.ruralhome.org/pressreleasesview.php?id=154.

For further information, contact HAC at the address in Headlines Directory.

Pyramid (Continued from page 1)

look at everyday portions of favorite foods and adjust their choices to meet their daily needs.

A child-friendly version of MyPyramid for teachers and children is being developed. This version of MyPyramid is intended to reach children six to eleven years old with targeted messages about the importance of making smart eating and physical activity choices. Additional information about USDA’s MyPyramid is available at MyPyramid.gov. The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and consumer brochure are available at www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines.
Rural Housing

(Continued from page 2)

in competitive grants to non-profit organizations and public bodies to assist more than 2,100 very low- and low-income rural residents repair and rehabilitate their homes or rental housing.

Under the Guaranteed Rural Rental Housing Program, USDA provides loan guarantees to lenders, who in turn provide loans for the construction of rural multi-family housing complexes. USDA will guarantee the lender’s loan, up to 90 percent of the total development cost. All applications will be reviewed on an ongoing basis until May 13, 2005. Applications received after that date will be held for review subject to the availability of funds.

This year’s farm worker housing funding will be available to broad-based nonprofit organizations, nonprofit organizations of farm workers, federally recognized Indian tribes, state and local governments, and public agencies (such as public housing authorities). May 13, 2005 is the deadline for submitting applications for funding.

Funds are also available to family farms to construct housing for their workforce. These funds are available on a first-come basis.

Housing preservation grant funds are awarded to qualified public agencies, private nonprofit organizations, and other eligible entities, which will leverage the USDA grant funds with private, state and local funds to further extend the housing repair assistance into their local community. The deadline for housing preservation grant applications is also May 13, 2005.

In addition, USDA Rural Development announced that over $4 billion in single-family housing funds are available to assist more rural families become homeowners as part of President Bush’s Ownership Society initiative. Over 10 percent of these funds will help families build their own homes and bring home ownership opportunities to families living in the Colonias, underserved areas and Federally designated communities (Enterprise Communities, Empowerment Zones, and Rural Economic Area Partnership Zones).

In Illinois last year, Rural Development helped 3,259 homeowners last year with loans, loan guarantees and grants. So far this year, they have assisted more families than any other state with single family housing programs.

Program applications and procedures for these programs were published in the March 14, 2005 Federal Register. Further information regarding these programs and the application process can be obtained by visiting USDA’s web site at www.rurdev.usda.gov/rhs/, www.rurdev.usda.gov/ or by contacting any USDA Rural Development state office.

For further information, contact Joan Messina at (217) 403-6248 or visit www.rurdev.usda.gov.

Sweeping Changes

(Continued from page 5)

A public housing authority would be eligible to be a MTW site if it currently participates in MTW, if it is a high performer and administers at least 500 public housing units and 500 vouchers, or it meets “other criteria as determined by the Secretary.”

The MTW agency could combine public housing operating assistance, public housing capital funds and voucher assistance funds “to facilitate the transition to work.” MTW sites would have to target no less than 90% of these funds to families with incomes up to 60% of AMI. Rent setting would be flexible at the local level, as allowed under Title Two. The housing authority would have to assure that housing meets housing quality standards established or approved by the Secretary.

Current MTW demonstration sites could opt-in to the new, broader MTW program.

For further information, contact NLIHC at the address in Headlines Directory.
Headlines Directory

Center for Community Change
1000 Wisconsin Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20007
Telephone: (202) 342-0567
Fax: (202) 342-3462
http://www.communitychange.org

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
820 First Street, NE, Suite 510
Washington, DC 20002
Ph: (202) 406-1080
Fax: (202) 406-1056
http://www.cbpp.org

Corporation for Supportive Housing
1 N. LaSalle, 12th Floor
Chicago, IL 60602
Telephone: (312) 697-6125
Fax: (312) 435-0198
http://www.csh.org

Coalition of Citizens With Disabilities
300 E. Monroe, Suite 100
Springfield, IL 62701
Telephone: (217) 522-4022
Fax: (217) 782-1317
http://www.cch.org

Institute for Community Economics
3435 Liberty Drive
Springfield, IL 62704
Telephone: (217) 789-0125
Fax: (217) 789-0139
http://www.iceanet.org

Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence
801 S. 11th
Springfield, IL 62703
Telephone: (217) 789-2830
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http://www.ildv.org

Illinois Coalition to End Homelessness
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Telephone: (217) 785-6142
Fax: (217) 782-1206
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Illinois Department of Human Services
Homeless Services and Supportive Housing
400 W. Lawrence, 2C
Springfield, IL 62762
Telephone: (217) 782-1317
Fax: (217) 524-6029
http://www.deh.state.il.us/agency/dhs/

Illinois Food Bank Association
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401 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 900
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http://www.ihda.org

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National Alliance to End Homelessness
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Fax: (202) 638-4664
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http://www.naeh.org

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans
333 ½ Pennsylvania Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20003-1148
Telephone: (202) 566-1969
Fax: (202) 566-2063
E-mail: ncvh@ncvh.org
http://www.ncvh.org/home.html

National Coalition for the Homeless
1012 14th Street NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20005-3406
Telephone: (202) 737-6444
Fax: (202) 737-6442
http://nch.ari.net/

National Community Reinvestment Coalition
P.O. Box 595
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Marion, IL 62959
Telephone: (618) 993-0094
Fax: (618) 993-4013

National Coalition to End Homelessness
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Fax: (312) 939-6822

National Community Reinvestment Coalition
727 15th St., NW, #900
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Fax: (202) 628-9800

National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty
918 F Street NW 4142
Washington DC 20004
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Fax: (202) 628-2737

National Low-Income Housing Coalition
& National Low Income Housing Information Service
727 15th St NW, 6th Floor
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Fax: (202) 393-1973
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http://www.nlchc.org

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Fax: (202) 393-3034
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Rural Development
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Statewide Housing Action Coalition
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Supportive Housing Providers Association
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Office of Community Planning and Development
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Fax: (312) 353-1696

Center for Supportive Housing
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Food Research and Action Center
1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, # 540
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Fax: (202)986-2525
foodresearch@fac.org

Housing Assistance Council
1025 Vermont Ave. NW, Suite 606
Washington, D.C. 20005
Telephone: (202) 842-8600
Fax: (202) 347-3441
http://www.ruralhome.org

Coalition of Illinois with Disabilities
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Fax: (217) 522-7016
http://www.icaanet.org/

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1 N. LaSalle, 12th Floor
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Fax: (217) 789-0139
http://www.icaanet.org

Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
1325 S. Wabash, Suite 205
Chicago, IL 60605
Telephone: (312) 345-4548
Fax: (312) 435-0198
http://www.enteract.com/~cch/index.htm

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